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Promotion and protection of the rights of children

Annual report of the Special Reprcsentative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

Summary

The present annual report provides, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 69/157, an overview of major developments promoted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children to sustain and scale up efforts to safeguard children's freedom from violence.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report reviews key developments promoted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children at the global, regional and national levels and provides an overview of the results achieved in protecting children from violence.

2. In her role as a global independent advocate for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children, the Special Representative remains strongly committed to further enhancing efforts to accelerate progress in that process.

3. Over recent years the protection of children from violence has evolved from a largely hidden and neglected topic into a growing global concern. Framed by international human rights standards, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Protocols, and guided by the United Nations study on violence against children, there has been a growing understanding of children's exposure to violence, strengthened commitments to secure their safety and protection, and significant national implementation efforts to mobilize support for prevention and response and to help change attitudes and behaviour which condone violence against children.

4. Those are promising developments, yet progress remains slow and uneven and the urgency of protecting children from violence has not diminished. As highlighted by recent United Nations reports, every year almost 1 billion children between the ages of 2 and 14 are subject to physical punishment by their caregivers; 84 million girls are victims of emotional, physical or sexual violence at the hands of their husbands or partners; child trafficking continues to increase, in some regions reaching more than 60 per cent of identified victims; and 8 per cent of global homicides affect children under the age of 15, while more than 50 per cent affect young people below the age of 30.

5. As underscored by the global survey on violence against children *Toward a World Free from Violence*,[1] conducted by the Special Representative in 2013, there is no time for complacency. It is crucial to consolidate the gains that have been made, grasp the lessons learned and redouble efforts to shape a dynamic process of change and build a world where all children can grow up free from violence. The cost of inaction for every child and for the social progress of humanity is too great to be borne. The opportunity for change is too close to let slip. In 2016, as the international community commemorates the tenth anniversary of the study and embarks on implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, the protection of children from violence needs to be at the front and centre of the policy actions of every nation.

[1] Available from srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/page/Global_Progress_Survey_2011.

Box 1
Highlights of the mandate of the Special Representative

- **Consolidating the human rights foundation of protecting children from violence** through the launch in 2010 of the campaign for the universal ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has led to a steady increase in the number of ratifications to the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, now in force in 169 countries; and through the promotion of new international standards, including the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure, ILO Convention No. 189 (2011) concerning decent work for domestic workers and the United Nations Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 69/194.

- **Enhancing awareness and consolidating knowledge to prevent and respond to violence against children** through hosting international expert consultations and the development of research on strategic topics.[2] Those include *Toward a World Free from Violence: Global Survey on Violence against Children*, a report on consultations with children on the post-2015 development agenda, and 10 thematic studies on a variety of topics, including violence in schools and in the justice system, restorative justice for children, child-sensitive counselling, reporting and complaint mechanisms, protection from harmful practices and opportunities and risks associated with information and communication technologies, as well as the production of child-friendly materials to inform and empower children on their right to freedom from violence.[3]

- **Promoting regional processes for the implementation of the recommendations in the study on violence against children** through seven high-level regional consultations held in South and Central America, the Caribbean, South Asia, the Pacific, Europe and the Arab region; six regional reports issued and periodic review meetings held to assess and accelerate progress; and five cross-regional round tables hosted to enhance cooperation on the prevention and elimination of violence.

- **Global advocacy on neglected areas of concern** in support of new United Nations initiatives, including the request by the General Assembly in its resolutions 69/158 for a report on protecting children from bullying, and 69/157 for a global study on children deprived of liberty; and the decision of the Human Rights Council in resolution 28/6 to establish a new mandate for an Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism.

- **Fostering a growing alliance amongst Governments, national institutions, civil society and faith-based organizations, academics and children's networks** as a major thrust of the global advocacy efforts of the mandate to mobilize action and investment in the protection of children from violence and support for national implementation efforts, including through over 130 missions to 60 countries conducted since 2009.

[2] See srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/knowledge.
[3] Available from srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/publications and srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/children-corner/materials.

6. The agenda of the Special Representative has been guided by four strategic priorities: consolidating progress and mainstreaming the recommendations in the study on violence against children in the policy agenda; reinforcing regional processes to enhance the protection of children from violence; ensuring prominence for violence against children on the global development agenda; and addressing emerging concerns, which in 2015 includes a focus on children affected by armed violence in the community. In the sections below she reviews the progress made on that important agenda.

II. Consolidating progress and mainstreaming the recommendations in the United Nations study on violence against children in the national policy agenda

7. The commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly and opening for signature, ratification and accession of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in November 2014 provided significant opportunities to mobilize support for the protection of children from violence in the priority areas identified by the mandate. Events organized around the world helped to revitalize networks, develop new partnerships and promote campaigns to prevent violence and its impact on the development and well-being of children. That has generated enhanced support for legal and policy reforms and for the consolidation of data and research to prevent and address violence against children. Consequently, concrete results have been achieved.

A. A national agenda on violence against children

8. At the national level, more than 90 countries now have a multisectoral agenda to prevent and address all forms of violence against children, which is double the number in 2006. That includes most recently the Dominican Republic, the first nation in Central America to adopt such a road map, Ecuador, Ghana, Indonesia, Norway and the United Republic of Tanzania.

9. Multisectoral agendas are crucial for promoting coordinated action across government departments and between central and local authorities; fostering synergy between institutions and overcoming working in silos, with the risk that can present of leaving behind the most vulnerable children; and generating resources for implementation.

10. In some countries, the agenda constitutes a core component of the national development plan and is supported by research that has uncovered the scale of children's exposure to violence. Led by a high-level authority and implemented by a cross-departmental body, along with civil society, the agenda provides a key reference for action by central and local authorities. Some Governments have also issued guidelines for child protection budgeting to provide predictable funding for implementation. The recently adopted policy of the Government of Ghana is described in box 2 below.

Box 2
Ghana child and family welfare policy 2015

Launched by the President of Ghana in July 2015, the new policy focuses on the prevention of violence, abuse and exploitation of children. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection will lead and coordinate the implementation of the policy, which is informed by extensive consultations and significant research.

The new policy seeks to establish a well-structured and coordinated child and family welfare system to promote the well-being of children, prevent harm and protect children from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

The main objectives of the policy are to: (a) design child and family welfare programmes and activities to prevent violence against children and protect them from it more effectively; (b) ensure effective coordination of the child and family welfare system; (c) empower children and families to understand better abusive situations and make choices to prevent and respond to situations of risk; (d) build the capacity of institutions and service providers to ensure the quality of services for children and families in both urban and rural areas; (e) reform existing laws and policies; and (f) ensure the provision of adequate resources for the functioning of the child and family welfare system at all levels.

The policy stresses the importance of implementation, monitoring, evaluation, research and advocacy, and highlights the need to improve the information management system for overall child protection with better data and evidence of the impact of the expected system reform.

B. Clear legislation to ban all forms of violence against children

11. The past year was marked by important legislative reforms to ban violence against children. Andorra, Argentina, Benin, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Estonia, Malta, Nicaragua and San Marino have recently enacted legislation to that effect and several other States are nearing that goal. Today, 47 countries have comprehensive and explicit legal bans on all forms of violence against children, tripling the number in place since 2006.

12. A clear message through legislation is crucial for legitimizing action by the authorities and mobilizing social support for changes in perceptions, attitudes and behaviour. However, efforts are also needed to close the gap between law and practice, as violence too often remains accepted as a child-rearing practice, as a form of discipline in schools and care institutions and as a punishment in judicial sentencing. For that reason, many countries accompany legislative reforms with information and social mobilization campaigns to rally support and overcome harmful social norms; with positive parenting and early childhood programmes to promote non-violent discipline; and with guidance, ethical standards and capacity-building initiatives to enhance the skills of professionals working with and for children. Those efforts have led to a decrease in the social acceptance of violence and greater confidence in reporting its incidents. Legislative reforms by the Governments of Brazil and Nicaragua to ban violence against children are described in boxes 3 and 4 below.

Box 3
Brazil amends its code on children and adolescents

The amendments to the code on children and adolescents in Brazil, introduced in 2014, recognize the rights of children and adolescents to education and care without the use of physical punishment or cruel or degrading treatment as forms of correction, discipline, education or under any other pretext, either by their parents, members of their extended family or others responsible for them; by public officials implementing social and educational measures; or by any other person entrusted with their care, treatment, education or protection. Other measures foreseen to support implementation of the code include referral to a family protection programme; warnings and referral to guidance courses and the promotion of educational campaigns; ongoing professional training; and initiatives to support non-violent parenting, education and conflict resolution.

Box 4
Nicaragua approves new family code

The new family code came into force in April 2015. Article 280 recognizes that "the father, mother, or other family members, guardians or other persons legally responsible for the son or daughter have the responsibility, right and duty to provide, in a manner consistent with the child's evolving capacities, appropriate direction and guidance to the child, without putting at risk his or her health, physical integrity, psychological and personal dignity and under no circumstances using physical punishment or any type of humiliating treatment as a form of correction or discipline. The Ministry of Family, Youth and Children, in coordination with other State institutions and society shall promote forms of positive, participatory and non-violent discipline as alternatives to physical punishment and other forms of humiliating discipline."

C. Sound data and research on children's exposure to violence

13. Significant efforts have continued to break the invisibility and address the root causes of violence against children. In Africa and Asia, 15 countries have set in motion comprehensive national household surveys to gather data on children's exposure to sexual, physical and emotional violence.[4]

14. The results from those surveys press for urgent action. They expose serious levels of violence shaping children's lives and they highlight the gap between the large number of children exposed to violence and the very limited number of victims seeking help and the even smaller number benefiting from the services that are needed. For example, across seven of the countries surveyed, more than 25 per

[4] Botswana, Cambodia, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Swaziland, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

cent of girls and 10 per cent of boys had endured sexual violence, but less than 10 per cent of victims had received support from social services.[5]

15. The gathering, analysis and dissemination of timely, reliable and disaggregated data on violence against children provide a firm foundation to break the silence around violence, to stimulate public debate and promote change in attitudes and behaviour and mobilize support for initiatives to prevent violence. Moreover, those efforts have helped in ensuring that policymaking and resource allocation are evidence-based and in monitoring progress and evaluating the cost-effectiveness and impact of interventions. With such an approach, nations can gain a holistic view of the incidence and cumulative impact of violence on children and prevention of violence has a genuine chance of succeeding.

16. Data and research is a priority for the Special Representative, who has been closely associated with those national efforts. In that regard, she joined the Government of Cambodia at the end of 2014 in the launch of its comprehensive survey, the first in the East Asia region (see box 5); and in March 2015 she joined the Government of Malawi in the launch of its survey. In both countries, strategic policy agendas were developed based on the survey data.

Box 5
Survey of violence against children in Cambodia

The survey on violence against children was commissioned by the Government of Cambodia in response to the call for data collection and research at the national level in the United Nations study on violence against children. Promoted in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the survey was conducted by a multisectoral steering committee with representation from line ministries and government agencies. The strong cooperation developed through the committee created an effective infrastructure to enable the survey results to be translated into programmatic actions.

The survey adhered to strict ethical guidelines on research involving children, including in relation to seeking parental consent while protecting the confidentiality of participants, and put in place a response plan to offer referral and support to child respondents who might feel upset or unsafe with the interview, or who disclosed situations of violence.

The findings highlighted the significant prevalence of violence in childhood, with over 50 per cent of children experiencing at least one form of violence before the age of 18 and incidents of physical, emotional and sexual violence likely to occur multiple times. Parents, caregivers, teachers and other adult family members were often the abusers and most child victims failed to report sexual abuse or seek help from the relevant services.

To address the concerns revealed by the survey, the Government committed to putting in place a coordinated response, involving all relevant sectors and professionals working with children and their families. Core commitments included

[5] See United States of America Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, morbidity and mortality weekly report. Available from www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6421a1.htm.

the development of a national action plan with an integrated data collection and monitoring mechanism; the development and enforcement of national legislation for the protection of children from violence and abuse; the promotion of non-violent values and changes in perceptions, attitudes and practices through awareness-raising and primary prevention programmes; increased understanding of violence amongst adults and children and strengthened ability to identify and report incidents; building children's own resilience to violence and the promotion of child participation at all stages; the establishment of a child-friendly reporting mechanism; coordinated multisector systems for the identification, reporting and referral of cases of violence at the national and subnational levels; the development of minimum operating standards, guidelines and protocols to respond to cases of violence for legal, health and social services; schools free from violence and staff members with the knowledge and basic skills to prevent, identify, refer, report and respond to violence; and police investigations governed by child-friendly procedures and police stations staffed by designated female police trained in child-sensitive interviewing.

D. Violence as a major concern for children

17. Those major achievements should be welcomed, but greater efforts are needed to overcome the widespread and hidden nature of violence against children. Children endure violence with a deep sense of fear and insecurity when they witness it and when they experience neglect and trauma and endure intimidation, humiliation, physical aggression, abuse and exploitation.

18. Violence has a cumulative impact on children and the most excluded are the hardest hit, with limited access to basic quality social services for their protection, recovery and reintegration. At times, they are also endangered by harmful social norms.

19. Younger children are at high risk of violence, especially when they are placed in residential care. They are heavily dependent on caregivers for their development and well-being, and when neglected, injured or abused, they have less ability to speak up and seek support. If they are surrounded by violence and stress, they can suffer long-lasting emotional trauma and harm to their health, including irreversible damage to brain development.

20. As children grow, cumulative forms of violence continue to shape their daily lives, with high risks of being forced into early marriage or subject to other harmful practices or exploitative work. In some cases, children endure violence during long periods in detention without ever being charged, sometimes simply for being homeless and sleeping on the street; and in some countries, they may face inhumane sentencing, such as stoning, amputation, life imprisonment or capital punishment.

21. That pervasive pattern explains why violence against children is a major concern for young people. This was captured in the review conducted by the Special Representative, together with civil society partners, of online surveys and more than 80 national consultations held with children around the world on the post-2015 global development agenda. More than 800,000 children joined the process and their message was unambiguous: "Violence is a major obstacle to child development

and it urgently needs to be brought to an end!" Across the regions, violence was highlighted as a priority and an area where urgent action is expected from world leaders.

22. That is also the message conveyed when the Special Representative meets children in her missions around the world. Children express deep frustration at the levels of neglect, abuse and fear surrounding their lives. Those affected by community violence see their days surrounded by fear of extortion and manipulation by violent gangs and criminal networks, fear of being stigmatized as a danger to society and fear of being criminalized by the police.

23. Children feel physically hurt, but their dignity and self-esteem are also deeply wounded. They call for security and justice. Security to grow up with confidence, enjoying safety and protection from the risk of abuse, exploitation and reprisals; and justice to safeguard their rights, be treated with fairness and supported in their fight against impunity.

24. However, most children are left with no information about where to go and what to do when they are at risk of violence, or exposed to its serious manifestations, and legal or formal proceedings remain too complex for them to understand or feel empowered to use. Against all odds, that situation seldom compromises children's courage and determination. Through school debates, radio and television programmes and street drama, and increasingly through social media, young people inform their peers and their families about the risks of violence and advocate for solutions to prevent it.

25. Children's recommendations reveal remarkable resilience and a decisive determination to raise awareness, generate solidarity and support child victims in their recovery and reintegration and in obtaining redress. Listening to the views and experiences of young people is critical for seeing the hidden face of violence and, more importantly, for becoming better equipped to prevent it and monitoring progress and the impact of national efforts.

III. Reinforcing regional processes to enhance the protection of children from violence

26. Regional organizations and institutions have been strategic allies in initiatives for the prevention and elimination of violence. The cooperation they have developed with the Special Representative has been instrumental in placing violence against children at the heart of the regional policy agenda, to accelerate progress, enhance the accountability of States and support national implementation efforts.

27. That in turn has led to strengthened regional commitments on the prevention of, and response to, violence and to the mainstreaming of persisting and emerging concerns in regional processes and initiatives. The inclusion in regional agendas of issues such as violence in early childhood, harmful practices, sexual violence, or the role of information and communications technologies in the fight against violence, are examples of successful cooperation.

A. Consolidating regional commitments

28. Over the past year, significant strides have been made in the process of consolidating regional commitments. In the Americas, the twenty-first Pan-American Child and Adolescent Congress of the Organization of American States on the theme of "Childhood: building environments of peace," hosted by the Government of Brazil, was devoted to the protection of children from violence, including in the context of juvenile justice, and from sexual exploitation. The Congress reiterated the commitment of the continent to using the United Nations study on violence against children as an indispensable reference for action, including securing strong national laws, plans and programmes; mobilizing adequate resources; consolidating data; strengthening awareness-raising initiatives; and greater investment in violence prevention.[6]

29. In May 2015, the MERCOSUR Permanent Commission on Children agreed to develop a regional policy for the promotion of positive discipline and prevention of violence. In July 2015, the Caribbean Community Task Force on child rights and child protection developed a regional strategy on the prevention and elimination of violence against children for the period 2015-2020, to reinforce the protection of children from physical, emotional, sexual and online-related violence. The Central American Integrated System (SICA) initiated the drafting of a regional convention to address sexual violence against children, informed by a cross-regional discussion process supported by the Special Representative.

30. In East Asia, the Commission on the Rights of Women and Children of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is preparing a regional plan of action on the elimination of violence against children for the period 2015-2030 to promote the implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Children in 2013. The plan reiterates the regional commitment to ending violence against children, identifies key priorities for action and provides a solid foundation for implementation of the post-2015 agenda for sustainable development.

31. In the Pacific region, the President of Fiji hosted the first region-wide conference on ending violence against children, with the participation of senior government officials, community and faith-based organizations, child protection experts and donors from 15 Pacific island countries. Welcoming the support of the Special Representative, the conference reviewed strategies and programmes to prevent and respond to violence against children, including good practices in service delivery and increased resource allocation, and the establishment of family courts and of networks for referral and response across the health, education and social welfare sectors. The participants called for strengthened laws and policies and committed themselves to promoting violence-free families and societies for children in the Pacific nations.

32. The South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children spearheaded a regional action plan to end child marriage and the Kathmandu call for action to end child marriage, to accelerate progress in ending the practice, including through the urgent review of the compatibility of relevant legislation with human rights

[6] See the unified resolution of the Congress, available from xxicongresopanamericano.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/CPNNA-RES-1-XXI-14-Draft-UNified-Resolution-XXI-PCC-ENG.pdf.

standards; the establishment of a minimum legal age of marriage of 18; and the harmonization of laws prohibiting child marriage with laws protecting children from violence.[7]

33. Cooperation with African nations and institutions has been further pursued, including through the support of the Special Representative for the African Union campaign to combat child marriage. Marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Special Representative joined the African Union, the African Child Policy Forum and UNICEF in the development of the *African Report on Violence against Children*.[8] The report reviews regional progress on the study on violence against children and recommends an agenda for action to address persisting challenges. It draws on the research initiatives and household surveys undertaken in the region and it will make a significant contribution in to the Conference on the Status of Children's Rights in Africa, and the African Girls' Summit on Ending Child Marriage, both to be held in late 2015.

34. The Council of Europe is developing its strategy for the period 2016-2019 on the rights of the child, maintaining a sharp focus on violence against children and giving special attention to areas of concern raised by the Special Representative, namely the protection of children from online abuse, sexual violence and the increased risks associated with the economic crisis.

35. In July 2015, the European Union adopted an action plan on human rights and democracy for the period 2015-2019, in which it reaffirmed its commitment to the rights of the child, foresaw support for strengthened national systems for the protection of children from violence and promoted the ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

B. Strengthening cross-regional cooperation

36. The Special Representative organizes an annual round table with regional organizations and institutions to enhance cross-regional cooperation and accelerate progress in freeing children from violence. The high-level forum has become a strategic mechanism in the framework of the United Nations to promote policy dialogue; share knowledge and good practices; facilitate cross-fertilization of experiences; coordinate efforts and enhance synergies; identify trends and pressing challenges; and join forces to strengthen children's safety and protection.

37. In 2015, the fifth cross-regional round table was hosted with the Council of Europe and devoted to the elimination of sexual violence against children, including when associated with the use of information and communications technologies (see box 6). It gathered representatives from eight regional organizations and leading experts on child protection, cybercrime and online safety from human rights bodies, national Governments, academia and civil society organizations. The round table was organized back to back with the Octopus Conference on cooperation against cybercrime, held in Geneva in June 2015, and a meeting of the Committee of the

[7] See www.saievac.org/download/Thematic%20Area%20Resources/Child%20Marriage/RAP_Child_Marriage.pdf.

[8] Available from www.africanchildforum.org/rc1/index.php/component/sobipro/?pid=2&sid=115:the-african-report-on-violence-against-children&Itemid=0.

Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Committee).

38. Sexual violence continues to be surrounded by stigma and remains hidden and unreported, while children largely lack safe, accessible and child-sensitive counselling, reporting and complaint mechanisms.

39. The rapid evolution of information and communications technologies presents additional challenges, increasing the risk of sexual abuse and exploitation for young victims and creating serious difficulties for the investigation and prosecution of cases. At the same time, technology offers new opportunities for empowering children, reducing the risk of online abuse and enhancing cross-border cooperation.

40. Participants at the fifth cross-regional round table expressed concern at the pervasiveness and severity of sexual violence against children, its long-lasting impact on child victims and the high cost for society. In line with the study issued by the Special Representative entitled "Releasing children's potential and minimizing risks: ICTs, the Internet and violence against children",[9] they recognized the need to ensure balance in promoting children's access to, and use of, information and communications technologies while guaranteeing their online safety and protection. They committed to building a broad alliance and promoting a dedicated multi-stakeholder platform for the implementation of a safe, inclusive and empowering digital agenda for children.

Box 6
Highlights from the cross-regional round table held in 2015

The participants agreed to strengthen cooperation on children's protection from sexual violence and to:

(a) Promote the ratification and implementation of relevant international and regional standards and further strengthen national legislation to prohibit all forms of sexual violence against children in all settings, including online abuse; secure the protection of child victims, their access to effective remedies and to recovery and reintegration services and participation in child-friendly proceedings; establish mandatory reporting responsibilities for professionals working with and for children and prevent the recruitment of those convicted of acts of sexual violence; and investigate and punish those found responsible, when needed through international cooperation;

(b) Invest in prevention, through culturally sensitive information and education initiatives and the promotion of child-friendly materials to enhance children's awareness and protection;

(c) Enhance capacity-building activities for relevant professionals, supported by clear guidance, including on the early detection and referral of abuse, ethical standards on the counselling of and interviews with children, and referral and mandatory reporting responsibilities;

(d) Support children's empowerment through participation in online and offline initiatives, tapping into children's resourcefulness and enhancing their resilience;

[9] Available from srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/page/1154.

(e) Establish safe, accessible and child-sensitive counselling, reporting and complaint mechanisms for children, safeguarding the confidentiality of the proceedings and respect for children's right to privacy;

(f) Strengthen research and data to inform policymaking, to break the invisibility of sexual violence and to document good practices.

IV. Placing the protection of children from violence at the centre of the post-2015 development agenda

41. Ensuring that protecting children from violence is recognized as a distinct priority and cross-cutting concern in the post-2015 development agenda has been a priority for the Special Representative, as has promoting the inclusion of children's views in that process.

42. Children have a clear vision of the future they want for themselves and for everyone else: to enjoy a safe and healthy life, free from all forms of violence.

43. In order to capture the wealth of children's recommendations, the Special Representative, together with civil society partners, undertook a review of national consultations and online surveys on children's vision for the global development agenda. The report, entitled "Why children's protection from violence should be at the heart of the post-2015 agenda: a review of consultations with children on the post-2015 development agenda",[10] reiterated children's eagerness to influence that important process.

44. Protecting children from violence is a human rights imperative and is in addition a smart, cost-saving investment in the future sought by all. The multiplier and intergenerational effects of protecting children from violence will yield benefits for decades to come.

45. Violence against children knows no borders. It cuts across boundaries of gender, age, race, culture, wealth and geography. It happens in the home, on the streets, in schools, in the workplace, in justice and care institutions and also online. Violence is truly a universal concern. The impact on every child is immense and long lasting, but far beyond that, violence against children weakens the very foundation of social progress and sustainable development. It diverts billions from social spending, slows economic development and erodes the human and social capital of nations.

46. Violence against children is associated with high economic costs to society. The most recent global study on the economic burden resulting from physical, psychological and sexual violence, estimates that such costs could be as high as $7 trillion per year, more than 4 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP). According to UNICEF, in the Asia-Pacific region the yearly cost of violence against children is estimated to be $209 billion, equivalent to 2 per cent of the region's GDP.[11] When those huge costs are set against the benefits of modest investments in

[10] Available from srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/page/1153.

[11] See www.unicef.org/eapro/UNICEF_Child_Maltreatment_Research_Overview_FINAL.pdf.

proven strategies for the prevention of violence against children, the ethical case for urgent action becomes overwhelming.

47. Emphasizing that freedom from fear and violence is essential for sustainable development, the intergovernmental process on the post-2015 development agenda has recognized violence against children as a priority concern. The agreed targets on ending violence against children are achievable and measurable, and relevant to all countries. The decisive voice and influence of, and implementation by, Member States are now crucial to ensure that they are reached.

48. Robust indicators will be needed on the prevalence and severity of children's exposure to sexual, physical and emotional violence in order to measure progress towards the adopted targets. In that regard, the Special Representative will continue to advocate for strengthened national statistical capacities and for sound monitoring methodologies and tools to capture and address the magnitude and incidence of violence.

49. With the adoption of the new development agenda, the world needs to move towards implementation, putting in place the most effective strategies to reach the new targets on violence against children, securing sound resources and a transparent process for monitoring progress. There is already much to build on. As outlined in the present report, an increasing number of States now have legislative frameworks prohibiting violence against children, along with national plans of action on prevention and response, and mechanisms to collect and analyse data for planning and monitoring. That remarkable progress needs to be further consolidated until all countries have in place a comprehensive framework for the elimination of violence against children.

50. A global partnership to end violence against children to mobilize wide support and greater funding will give a powerful impetus towards that goal. The Special Representative has strongly supported efforts to establish a global partnership and will continue to foster that important initiative.

V. Protecting children affected by armed violence in the community

51. As highlighted by the United Nations study on violence against children, no community is free from violence. However, the risk of encountering violence, both against, as well as by, children, is much higher in some communities than in others. In some settings, especially those where weapons are in wide circulation, violence has today assumed frightening proportions. That topic remains a priority for the mandate of the Special Representative.

52. Armed violence in communities is a complex global phenomenon. It is often associated with organized crime, with non-State actors using threats and terror to control communities. It may be aggravated by climate change, natural disasters and environmental degradation, all of which intensify conflicts over access to natural resources and encourage mass migration to the cities and across borders. Explosive urban growth and the deterioration of urban areas can generate "no-go zones" with little or no State presence. All those processes facilitate the expansion of transnational organized crime, while the increasing globalization of illegal markets helps unlawful groups to control criminal activities. That undermines governance

and locks marginalized children into a vicious cycle of further marginalization and violence.

53. According to the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, on average more than 500,000 people die violently each year and 44 per cent of all violent deaths are from firearms. Most armed violence occurs in the context of crime or interpersonal conflict and 84 per cent of violent deaths occur in non-conflict countries.

54. Incidents of violence in the community, both those associated with criminal activities and those occurring in the privacy of the home are often deeply interconnected. They cause fear, insecurity and harm to families, communities and society in general. Children are hard hit, both as victims and as witnesses.

55. Adolescent boys are at high risk of homicide because they are more prone to participating in activities such as street fighting, street crime, gang membership and possession of weapons. For girls, the greatest risk is violence from intimate partners.

56. Violence associated with gangs, including extortion, physical violence, homicides and disappearances, has a shattering effect on childhood and adolescence. It compromises access to education and health services, recreation and social support; it is associated with lower levels of school enrolment and retention and higher levels of poverty; and it aggravates the risk of domestic violence and the vulnerability of children.

57. Too often, children from poor communities or from areas known for gang activity are stigmatized and perceived as delinquents, carrying an increased risk of criminalization and detention, and limited options for protection and genuine reintegration.

58. Migration can aggravate such a situation. In affected countries, many children live with only one or without any parent and in many cases deprivation is pervasive, with high rates of child poverty and limited access to social services to prevent and respond to violent incidents.

59. Children from disadvantaged communities are attractive targets for organized criminal networks. Through coercion, social pressure or the promise of financial reward, they are at risk of recruitment and manipulation to hold or deliver drugs or weapons, carry out petty crimes, beg on the streets, or become involved in other exploitative activities.

60. Public fear of gang violence and youth crime fuels the perception of children as a danger, rather than as being at risk, and mass media stigmatization helps to foster tolerance of institutionalized violence against them. In turn, that generates societal pressure to criminalize children and adolescents, lower minimum ages of criminal responsibility and impose longer prison sentences.

61. The process is exacerbated by weak rule of law, poor law enforcement, corruption and a generalized fear of retaliation, resulting in crimes going unreported, low numbers of convictions and a profound sense of impunity. That pattern is particularly serious when children and adolescents are subject to State violence, carried out by law enforcement agents or by private security guards acting with the consent or tolerance of government entities. Enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, torture or arbitrary detention make it particularly hard for

those children to access effective child protection mechanisms, seek redress and combat impunity. That only deepens the fear that prevents many victims from reporting violence and increases their lack of confidence in the justice system.

62. To address those pressing concerns, in July 2015 the Special Representative organized, in collaboration with UNICEF and the Government of Honduras, an international expert consultation in Tegucigalpa. The consultation brought together experts on children's rights, violence prevention and arms control from United Nations agencies, national Governments, independent institutions for children's rights, civil society, religious leaders, academia, the corporate sector and children and young people. The meeting provided important insights to inform the Special Representative's forthcoming report on the protection of children from armed violence in the community. The following are some key highlights.

A. Factors contributing to armed violence in the community

63. Many factors underlie violence in the community, including poverty, discrimination, social exclusion, lack of access to social services, deficiencies in governance and the presence of organized crime. That pattern is aggravated by drug and alcohol abuse, easy access to arms, unregulated urban growth and the participation of young people in illicit markets.

64. Investment in prevention rests on two pillars: the general understanding of how those factors function and a specific knowledge of how they manifest themselves in each community.[12]

Harmful consumption of drugs and alcohol

65. The consumption of alcohol and drugs can affect cognitive and physical function, mental health, self-control and the ability to assess risks. Impulsivity may increase, putting consumers at higher risk of resorting to violence in confrontations. An impaired ability to recognize warning signs in potentially dangerous situations can make them easy targets for perpetrators of violence. Experiencing or witnessing violence can lead to the harmful use of alcohol as a way of coping or self-medicating. According to a World Health Organization (WHO) study in 2014, 34.1 per cent of adolescents (15-19 years old) drink alcohol; in the Americas and Europe the numbers rise to 52 per cent and 69.5 per cent respectively.[13] Another WHO report in 2006 indicated that alcohol was a contributor to 26 per cent of the years of life lost to homicide among males and 16 per cent for females.[14]

66. Patterns of drug and alcohol use vary by country, depending on cultural norms and government regulations. The problem is aggravated when drugs, alcohol and violence become part of the ritual culture of youth gangs. According to studies in the United States of America, alcohol is a basic component of gang culture and is closely linked to violence. Quarrels among gang members routinely arise after consuming alcohol; they drink before fights to strengthen their confidence and

[12] See *Small Arms Survey 2008: Risk and Resilience* (Cambridge, United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[13] World Health Organization, *Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health* (Geneva, 2014).

[14] World Health Organization, "Youth violence and alcohol" (Geneva, 2006).

afterwards to cement the bond within the gang. According to the research, alcohol and violence are also commonly used in gang initiation rites.[15]

Easy access to guns

67. It is estimated that some 900 million small arms and light weapons are in circulation worldwide: one for every seven persons. Around 75 per cent of the world's guns are in the hands of civilians.[16]

68. The proliferation of firearms is an important driver of violence. Guns increase the deadliness of violence and where criminal organizations operate, the arms trade also thrives. The slums of big cities are ideal spaces for the illegal sale of weapons. The ready availability of guns facilitates the recruitment of children to perform risky activities for organized crime. If firearms laws are weak or poorly enforced, the legal commerce in guns can fuel their illicit traffic, as legally purchased weapons move into the hands of unauthorized users, either within the same jurisdiction or across borders.

Uncontrolled urban growth

69. Governments often lack the resources or capacity to deal with uncontrolled urbanization, or the explosion of informal slums created by migration from poor rural areas to cities. Communities with high concentrations of low-income families tend to have high levels of residential instability, making it difficult for people to develop strong social ties and support networks. Areas lacking basic services, where there is little or no formal institutional presence, become very unsafe. Cities with high levels of economic inequality and endemic poverty are often affected by insecurity, political tension and instability, leading to increased fear and violence, compromising the safety and well-being of children, while deepening their vulnerability and deprivation. That creates a fertile environment for illegal markets, illicit access to weapons and the emergence of criminal gangs.

70. An estimated 1 billion people live in slums or other highly unstable communities. Informal economies flourish there, sometimes merging with illicit markets. The production, distribution and marketing of drugs, weapons, counterfeit goods, vehicles and metals in those underground markets generate significant wealth. For marginalized young people in urban areas, participating in such markets may be perceived as an opportunity for economic inclusion (albeit illegal) and at times as a means to gain "respect" and recognition. Their participation often includes risky behaviour, such as alcohol consumption and the use and display of weapons. Illicit drug dealing by young people can lead to an increase in their own consumption.

B. Direct and indirect impact of armed violence on children

71. Armed violence in the community disrupts social harmony and peace, generating a cumulatively negative effect on the lives of children. It affects a child's

[15] See Geoffrey P. Hunt and Karen Joe Laidler, "Alcohol and violence in the lives of gang members", *Alcohol Research & Health*, vol. 25, No. 1 (2001).

[16] See *Small Arms Survey 2007: Guns and the City* (Cambridge, United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press).

nurturing environment, in the home, at school and in the neighbourhood; it hampers health and care institutions; and it is associated with enhanced challenges to fighting impunity.

72. The direct effects of armed violence in the community include physical injuries and psychological harm, as well as deaths. Homicides have a young face. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, homicide claims some 36,000 children under the age of 15 each year (8 per cent of all victims) and about 43 per cent of all homicides are of adolescents and young people aged between 15 and 29. Overall, 40 per cent of homicides are from firearms; however among children and youths killed in the Americas that figure is almost 70 per cent. As regards non-lethal injuries, it is estimated that for every youth homicide, between 20 and 40 young people receive hospital treatment for violence.

73. Beyond the direct damage it causes, armed violence has a psychological and cultural impact. Weapons are involved in forced recruitment into gangs and criminal networks and in kidnapping, abuse and sexual exploitation, torture, forced displacement and other serious human rights violations.

74. As well as victimizing children directly, injuries and deaths from armed violence affect relatives and others in their social circle. The trauma of the loss of parents, loved ones, peers, friends and role models produces profound changes in children's lives. Too often, children living in violent communities must suddenly assume adult responsibilities of caring for siblings, minding the home and going to work, thereby sacrificing their own education and development. Moreover, children may become involved with violent gangs for protection, or to seek revenge against aggressors, thus placing themselves at greater risk.

75. Because of their social leadership role, schools and health institutions may be attacked and used by violent organizations to control territories. Those attacks can range from bribery and the kidnapping of workers to threats that ultimately lead institutions to close. For children, that means a deep sense of insecurity and a negative impact on their ability to learn and thrive. Gangs sometimes use schools to recruit children to join in illicit activities. Furthermore, injuries from armed violence use up the human and material resources of health-care centres, reducing their ability to prevent and respond to other health problems.

C. Children, youth gangs and organized crime networks

76. Home to socially excluded children and young people, gangs may begin as unsupervised adolescent peer groups, but some become institutionalized in neighbourhoods, ghettos and prisons.

77. Institutionalized gangs may become business enterprises within the informal economy and a few are linked to international criminal cartels. However, not every group of young people is a gang and not all gangs are the same. Gangs are not all violent and only some are linked to organized crime.

78. Gangs can provide young people with an identity and sense of belonging, as well as protection, recognition and respect. However, local gangs can also be linked to illegal activities, including extortion, illegal drug sales, fighting for territorial control and, in extreme cases, contract killings. Gangs may be associated with transnational criminal groups whose strong economic connections facilitate their

activities in trafficking, organized theft and mass distribution of illegal merchandise.

79. Research on gangs in Honduras has shed some light on factors that lead adolescents to join or leave a gang. Joining a gang is more likely for a young person whose parents are absent for economic reasons, including as a result of migration, and for whom no other authority figure has stepped in. In one group studied, gang members who had lost their parents saw the gang as a replacement family. In another group, gang members were far more driven by financial reasons, regarding the leader as the boss of the business. Overall, the most common reasons for leaving the gang were the birth of a first child, concern about damage being caused to family members, the opportunity to move to a different neighbourhood, commitment to the community and having a spiritual experience.

80. Children and adolescents in vulnerable situations are easy targets for transnational crime organizations dealing with stolen vehicles or goods, weapons, drugs, metals or persons. Occupying subordinate roles, the youngsters are seen as disposable labour and exposed to a high risk of violence.

81. The drugs trade typically uses children and adolescents for the most dangerous activities, such as monitoring territory, the transport and retail sale of drugs, or theft. Some children may end up being associated with criminal activities, including human trafficking, kidnapping and extortion and contract killings. Boys and girls may participate in human trafficking from an early age, as guides, lookouts or informants. Thereafter, they may be required to take care of safe houses and prevent escapes and later they may be armed and become involved in more dangerous tasks.

82. At the low level of "narco retail", children's exposure to violence may be particularly high owing to clashes over territory, the protection of merchandise, or punishment by their adult masters if they fall short of expectations.

D. Protecting children from armed violence in the community

83. Responses to young people associated with violent acts often emphasize punitive approaches. That is especially the case when they belong to a gang, although with little distinction between levels of responsibility within such groups.

84. That approach has led to the increasing severity of criminal penalties, the lowering of the minimum age of criminal responsibility and criminalization of the lower levels of illegal organizations, where the involvement of marginalized children and teenagers is concentrated. Young offenders tend to be incarcerated in overcrowded detention centres, at times together with adults, risking engagement with criminal gangs which control their communities beyond the prison walls. Rather than enhancing prevention, this leads to greater violence.

85. To counter the complex and multifaceted phenomenon of armed violence, it is essential to develop a comprehensive agenda where human rights are safeguarded, social inclusion and human development are promoted and people can live free from fear and violence.

86. That can be achieved by securing robust accountability systems, peaceful environments for children and strategies to limit the harmful use of alcohol and firearms, uphold public safety and provide access to justice and restorative justice processes. Those dimensions are addressed below.

Enhancing accountability for children's rights, strengthened policymaking and committed local action

87. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international standards recognize the primary responsibility of the State for the protection of children's rights at all times, including when violence, insecurity and crime shape community life. They call for a steady and sustained process of implementation.

88. Armed violence in the community compromises the enjoyment of children's rights, including the right to live free from violence; to personal integrity; to protection from discrimination, neglect, abuse and exploitation; to health and education, leisure and recreation; to freedom of expression, assembly, association and movement; and to access justice, effective remedies and judicial protection.

89. States need to adopt a wide-ranging and integrated approach to prevent violence and to safeguard the rights and best interests of the child in all decisions, including the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of all legal, political, administrative and budgetary measures.

90. State policies need to address the root causes of armed violence, including deprivation and social exclusion; undertake gender-sensitive approaches to secure boys' and girls' safety and protection, and the recovery and reintegration of victims; and fight impunity. Special protection measures are also needed for children and young people who try to leave gangs and organized criminal structures, to counter the risks they face and promote long-term options for their reintegration.

91. The success of those measures depends on genuine political will and a commitment to acting in a coordinated manner at the national and community levels. Central departments and local authorities are indispensable and mutually supportive players, including those dealing with social affairs, health and education, as well as justice and law enforcement, planning, financing and urbanization. Guided by international human rights standards, mobilizing secure funding and support from all areas and coordinating the diverse actors effectively, they can build and preserve safe spaces, including through early warning systems, and help transform violent contexts into inclusive, caring and peaceful environments for children and their families.

92. A solid legal framework legitimizes that process, especially when it clearly prohibits all forms of violence against children and offers effective mechanisms to provide counselling and referrals for those at risk, as well as for reporting, investigating and responding to incidents of violence.

93. Data and research are needed to capture the manifestations and incidence of armed violence, to monitor progress and the impact of interventions and to document initiatives that actually work.

94. Conflict prevention and resolution calls for the involvement of all actors, including children and young people. Listening to the experiences and opinions of children helps to reveal the hidden face of violence and to capture perceptions, attitudes and behaviour which may fuel increased acts of violence. Children's views help to develop better tools and strategies for prevention and building resilience, for counselling, reporting and reintegration and for evaluating the impact on children's lives.

95. It is equally important to engage with those involved with gangs. Although seen as lawbreakers, they can become influential interlocutors and help to modify gang behaviour and change violent environments.

Building safe and nurturing environments for children

96. Accountability and leadership for children need to translate into safe and violent-free environments in their homes, schools and neighbourhoods.

97. The family home is most often a place of safety, protection and learning, but it can also be a place where violence is witnessed, endured and reproduced. Raising children in nurturing and non-violent environments, where human rights are respected, helps to prevent armed violence in the community. The support of the State for parents in their child-rearing responsibilities is vital, both through social policies and universal access to basic social services of quality, and through positive parenting initiatives and guidance to caregivers to enhance their skills in child development, non-violent discipline, promotion of gender equality and non-violent masculine identities. That is particularly needed when families fear for the safety of their children, or require support, healing and closed-door mediation to overcome the distress associated with community violence.

98. The school is especially important for connecting children, families and teachers and in remote areas it can become a bridge between a child's home and the community. Schools have a unique potential to nurture non-violent behaviour and to change attitudes that condone violence.

99. The promotion of social inclusion, empathy and anger management, mediation and peaceful conflict resolution at school and in the community helps to build spaces of coexistence and dialogue, to address grief and to overcome differences, tensions and the stigmatization of children at risk. Age-, gender- and culturally sensitive initiatives provide opportunities to invest in young people's potential and self-esteem, to express diversity and gain leadership skills through sports and art and to offer a better chance in education and a different path in life.

100. When neighbourhoods and cities are safe, those efforts have a greater chance of succeeding. The commitment to preventing violence and the protection of children can be enhanced and impunity more effectively fought with improved urban governance, trusted authorities, strategic alliances with all parts of society, community surveillance mechanisms and urban design that reduces the opportunities for violence and crime.

101. In communities affected by armed violence, children and young people from marginalized areas are often perceived as a threat to society. Violence drives and is driven by fear and is also associated with an environment of tolerance of violence, an inability to settle conflicts in a peaceful way, lack of confidence in the authorities and fear of reporting, which in turn leads to high levels of impunity.

102. Outreach, awareness-raising, communication and social mobilization strategies are indispensable to countering those trends and promoting change in individual and collective attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. All sectors of society must be involved in the process, including local leaders, religious communities, professional and civic associations, the business sector and the media. Indeed, media organizations may sometimes contribute to the climate of fear, stigmatization and suspicion, but they can also become strategic partners by supporting efforts to address misperceptions,

change social norms that condone violence and crime and promote healing, peace and coexistence. Such efforts are particularly effective when those actors engage in public campaigns to mobilize public opinion and all levels of government to invest in services for children and build safe neighbourhoods.

Reducing the harmful use of alcohol and the availability of arms

103. The combination of alcohol and weapons often features in situations of community violence. Measures to reduce the availability and harmful use of alcohol are essential for protecting the rights of children and reducing armed violence in the community. Conventional strategies include raising prices, minimum age limits and the restriction of hours and venues where alcohol is sold.

104. Large public education campaigns have been developed in support of changing cultural norms around drinking; they are most effective when they involve a variety of sectors and are part of a comprehensive strategy, including increased community safety and legal enforcement.

105. Arms trafficking thrives in areas where violence and organized crime are present and calls for comprehensive strategies aimed at stemming the flow of guns. Reducing the proliferation of guns requires national and international regulation, intervention by the police and the courts, public awareness and disarmament efforts. It also requires responsibility and accountability in the private sector, from gun manufacturers and sellers to private security companies, whose armed staff outnumber the police in some countries.

106. A coherent legal framework is essential for the success of efforts to reduce gun proliferation and prevent armed violence. Legislation should prevent access to guns by children and restrictions on arms in schools and other public settings where children may be placed at risk. It should set high standards for permission to acquire, possess or use guns; limit the number and types of guns permitted for different categories of users; and make authorized owners accountable, while removing weapons from people who cannot meet those standards of responsibility.

107. Regulating international arms transfers is equally critical. Important international standards have been adopted with this aim, including the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects and the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons; the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; and the Arms Trade Treaty.

108. Changing attitudes towards guns is also a crucial prevention strategy. Promoting gun-free zones is an important community-led initiative which has helped to increase the sense of safety, reduce gunshots on the street and decrease the social acceptance of weapons. Pioneered in South Africa in the 1990s, that model has since been applied in Colombia, El Salvador, Sierra Leone and Solomon Islands.

109. Public campaigns and social mobilization can raise awareness and promote cultural change regarding gun possession and use. Some initiatives are associated with law reform developments, weapons collection and destruction programmes or bans on carrying guns. When based on sound data and research, they can help to

build strong partnerships between advocacy groups, religious communities, human rights organizations and businesses.

110. Some campaigns are directed primarily at children. Alongside school initiatives to improve children's safety and skills for peaceful conflict resolution and increase awareness of gun violence, some countries have promoted the recycling of toy guns for artwork in schools, as well as exchanging them for books and other school supplies.

111. As in conflict and post-conflict situations, disarmament and demobilization programmes can be used in communities affected by armed violence to reduce the number of guns in circulation. In such initiatives, guns are surrendered in return for collective or individual rewards, such as building materials, vouchers for groceries and support for development projects. Those efforts are particularly successful when there is a high degree of public awareness, transparency and community involvement.

Securing public safety, access to justice and restorative justice approaches

112. The security of citizens is highly dependent on respect for the rule of law, transparent and accountable institutions and community engagement in public safety efforts. It requires collaboration between local violence prevention groups and the police to identify challenges and promote intervention strategies. Those strategies should support children's access to justice and to counselling and reporting mechanisms to address incidents of violence; avoid the stigmatization and detention of children at risk; promote programmes to prevent the recruitment and support the reintegration of children affected by armed violence, including those associated with gangs and criminal networks; set in place whistle-blower and accountability systems to counter institutional violence and arms trafficking; and develop initiatives to promote the disarmament of communities and change attitudes towards guns and the tolerance of violence. It also requires restorative justice processes to address those affected through mediation, conciliation and reintegration strategies.

113. Society demands strong responses when violence occurs and crimes are committed. However, ensuring accountability for those acts can be achieved through channels other than just the formal criminal justice system, especially when children and young people are the alleged perpetrators.

114. Rather than focusing on punishment, restorative justice addresses the causes and consequences of offending and aims to repair the harm caused by wrongdoing. Through a voluntary process, which involves all those concerned, it helps to strengthen community ties, while fostering repentance and forgiveness and shaping genuine and purposeful process of social reintegration.[17]

115. Restorative justice can be introduced into every stage of the criminal justice process and is relevant in other contexts, such as family, school, care institutions and communities. It allows for the design and implementation of holistic interventions in line with children's development and the achievement of their potential in all aspects of life.

116. The participatory dimension of restorative justice gives adolescents the opportunity to take responsibility in a constructive and forward-looking way and is associated with positive results. In fact, those participating in restorative

[17] See the report of the Special Representative, "Promoting restorative justice for children" (2013). Available from srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/page/919.

programmes show fewer tendencies towards antisocial behaviour and lower rates of recidivism. They are also less likely to become involved with gangs and are therefore at lower risk of becoming victims of gun or gang violence, which in many countries is a matter of life or death.

117. The impact of armed violence on children's lives is serious, cumulative and long lasting. Although significant knowledge gaps persist, the actions highlighted above lay a sound foundation for building peaceful, resilient and cohesive communities where children are protected and given a genuine chance of developing to their full potential.

VI. Looking ahead

118. **Over the past year, the Special Representative has pursued global advocacy with a broad range of partners, both within and beyond the United Nations system, on strengthening the protection of children from violence. Significant progress has been made, but further urgent efforts are needed to translate the vision of the United Nations study on the protection of children against violence into reality for all children.**

119. **The study will mark its tenth anniversary in 2016. It will also be the start of the implementation of the new sustainable development agenda, with its strategic target of ending all forms of violence against children.**

120. **It is imperative to seize the historic opportunity of the new sustainable development agenda and the anniversary of the study to place the protection of children from violence at the front and centre of the policy actions of every nation. It is vital to increase investment and re-energize action to build a world as big as the dream of children: a world where every child is free from fear and from violence.**

121. **With that aim, the Special Representative will mobilize enhanced support for the consolidation of progress in the priority areas of her mandate, and will pay special attention to:**

(a) **Achieving a quantum leap in the violence-related sustainable development goals by supporting national development strategies, in particular through the design and implementation of a comprehensive agenda for the prevention and elimination of violence, the enactment and enforcement of legislation banning all violence against children and the consolidation of data and research in that area, as well as through regional cooperation efforts on the protection of children from violence;**

(b) **Advancing the implementation of a safe, inclusive and empowering digital agenda for children by strengthening policy advocacy on the protection of children from online abuse and mobilizing support for a dedicated multi-stakeholder platform;**

(c) **Promoting research on the role of the media in the protection of children from violence, to address social norms condoning violence and to encourage ethical reporting for the safeguarding of children's rights;**

(d) **Further mainstreaming violence-related concerns in the United Nations agenda, through support for the report of the Secretary-General on**

protecting children from bullying and the global study on children deprived of liberty, to be submitted to the General Assembly at its seventy-first and seventy-second sessions respectively.

122. **The Special Representative looks forward to continuing to collaborate closely with Member States and all other stakeholders in the further implementation of her mandate towards building a world free from violence against children.**